

# Press release

30<sup>th</sup> September 2021

## Research explores the role of ethnicity on a person's decision to speak up

The National Guardian's Office (NGO) today (30<sup>th</sup> September) publishes [a research report](#) which explores how ethnicity can impact on whether a person speaks up to a Freedom to Speak Up Guardian.

The disproportionate impact of the pandemic on Black and minority ethnic health workers has highlighted how vital inclusion is for worker safety and wellbeing. Inclusion is essential for a healthy speak up, listen up and follow up culture.

But there has been little research into the impact a person's protected or other characteristics have on speaking up. The NGO commissioned research looking at people's experiences of accessing their Freedom to Speak Up Guardian and whether ethnicity has an impact. The research, published today, was produced by brap – the equalities charity - and Roger Kline OBE. [An accompanying report](#) from the NGO provides additional data collated by the NGO and details the NGO's next steps in response to this research.

The research found that Black and minority ethnic respondents were six times more likely than white respondents to say that they were more likely to raise a concern with a Guardian of the same ethnicity as themselves.

Compared to their white colleagues, discrimination was far more likely to feature in issues experienced by Black and minority ethnic workers involved in the research. There was an assumption that a Black or minority ethnic Guardian would understand and take seriously issues around bias and discrimination, which was reflected in their preference to speak up to a Freedom to Speak Up Guardian of the same ethnicity.

Despite these reservations, the research found that Black and minority ethnic workers who did speak up had comparable experiences to white workers. Black and minority ethnic workers who had spoken up also reported that they thought Freedom to Speak Up Guardians had a good understanding of discrimination and bias, were empathetic and had good listening skills.

*“This research is a starting place for further discussion.”* said Russell Parkinson, Head of Office and Strategy at the National Guardian's Office. *“It is clear that more work needs to be done to explore the many factors that can influence whether, when, and to whom a worker will speak up.*

*“The Freedom to Speak Up Guardian role requires courage, impartiality, empathy and learning. We continue to support Freedom to Speak Up Guardians so that they can support all workers skilfully and sensitively, and work within their organisations*

*to encourage a deep understanding of how barriers to speaking up can be recognised and mitigated. There is also a commitment in the People Plan for NHS England/Improvement to develop training for Freedom to Speak Up guardians and Workforce Race Equality experts. We will be publishing an accompanying piece of research, drawn from our annual survey of guardians to add to this conversation*

For more information or interviews contact: [comms@nationalguardianoffice.org.uk](mailto:comms@nationalguardianoffice.org.uk)

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## Notes for editors:

### About this research

The National Guardian's Office has published a report to accompany this research: **Inclusive Freedom to Speak Up: appreciating how what we bring to the workplace impacts on speaking up**

Available from: <https://bit.ly/3D0TIXX>

This report summarises the context of why we commissioned the research, with additional data collated by the NGO and details our next steps in response to this research.

### Difference Matters: The Impact of Ethnicity on Speaking Up

Available from: <https://bit.ly/3mdeEEp>

This report was commissioned by the National Guardian's Office to explore whether ethnic differences impact on whether people speak up to a Freedom to Speak Up Guardian.

### Methodology

The research was undertaken in four distinct phases:

- Phase 1: rapid literature review of the available academic and grey literature and relevant reports.
- Phase 2: one-to-one interviews 15 one-to-one interviews were conducted with a sample of Freedom to Speak Up Guardians supporting 18 NHS trusts across England.
- Phase 3: Between 7 March and 19 April 2021, an anonymous online survey was sent to workers working on eight trust sites. In total, 1,074 people responded to the survey. The ethnicity of respondents was broken down as follows: White/White British: 68.6% ; Black and minority ethnic: 31.4% .
- Phase 4: Two 1.5-hour focus groups, attended by almost all the participating Freedom to Speak Up Guardians, explored some of the themes arising from the survey and encouraged participants to expand on issues identified in phase 1.

## About the authors

**Roger Kline OBE** is Research Fellow at Middlesex University Business School. He authored 'The Snowy White Peaks of the NHS' (2014), designed the Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES) and was appointed as the joint national director of the WRES team (2015-17).

**Ghiyas Somra** is People, Policy, and Research Manager at brap, a charity transforming the way we think and do equality. Every year, brap works with over a hundred healthcare providers (including NHS trusts), providing support and development around organisational change, leadership development, and inclusive cultures.

## About the National Guardian's Office

The National Guardian's Office works to make speaking up become business as usual in health.

The office leads, trains and supports a network of Freedom to Speak Up Guardians in England and provides learning and challenge on speaking up matters to the healthcare system as a whole.

Since the establishment of the NHS National Guardian's Office in 2016 following the recommendation of the Francis Freedom to Speak Up Review there is now a wide-ranging network of over 700 Freedom to Speak Up Guardians in England supporting workers in nearly 500 organisations, in primary and secondary care, the independent sector and national bodies.

[www.nationalguardian.org.uk](http://www.nationalguardian.org.uk)

## About the National Guardian for the NHS

The role of a National Guardian for the NHS was a key recommendation from the Freedom to Speak Up Review.

The National Guardian provides leadership and support to Freedom to Speak Up Guardians across England in national bodies, NHS and independent sector organisations to ensure that speaking up becomes business as usual.

The role of National Guardian is a unique leadership position in the healthcare sector which requires the courage and skill to speak truth unto power.

A successor is currently being recruited to replace Dr Henrietta Hughes OBE who served as National Guardian from July 2016 – September 2021.